THE
EUGENICS REVIEW

Editorial Offices: The Eugenics Society, *20 Grosvenor Gardens, London, S.W.1. Editor for the Society—Eldon Moore.*

"Eugenics is the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally."

NOTES OF THE QUARTER

WE deeply regret to record the death, on October 28th, of our President, Sir Bernard Mallet. After a distinguished career in the Civil Service, Sir Bernard retired in 1920 and devoted himself to many sociological activities—firstly the Charity Organisation Society, then the *Eugenics Society,* and finally the International Population Union. He was in intimate touch with all three at the time of his death. In 1925 he was elected a Vice-President of this *Society,* and in 1928 President in succession to Major Darwin—thus becoming the third holder of that office. He maintained unusual health and vigour until 1930, when he was confined to his room for some months by an attack of phlebitis. Though he thereafter attempted to resume all his former activities, he never seemed fully to have recovered from the physical inactivity enforced by the phlebitis, and he suffered from the English winters. At the turn of this year he caught a slight cold and, after a short illness, died of the congestion of the lungs which followed. He was in his seventy-fourth year.

A memoir will be found on page 271.

Pending the election of a new President at the Annual General Meeting, Mr. B. S. Bramwell has been chosen as the temporary Chairman of Council, while Mr. C. F. Chance has been elected as Honorary Treasurer in his place.

On the recommendation of an *ad hoc* committee appointed to consider the subject, Council has definitely decided to limit the President's term of office to three years. There has as yet been no decision on the Council's nomination for the next holder of the office.

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Shortly after the election of the National Government a group of members of all parties and both Houses decided to form an unofficial Parliamentary committee for the study of sterilization. Wing-Commander James, who has for long been a Fellow of this *Society,* was elected the honorary secretary; and under his energetic impulse the committee has held several meetings, and finally agreed upon a permissive Bill which, we understand, is modelled on the lines of that introduced, unsuccessfully, into the Commons in 1931.

The new Bill, which will probably receive its first reading in the Commons before the spring, has already had a very good 'Press.' *The Lancet* (December 3rd) describes the statement of the case for legalizing sterilization as "sober and well-balanced." A leading article in *Nature* (December 10th) declares that the Bill "must surely commend itself to biologists, physicians and lawyers, for it is well drafted, deals only with the mentally deficient (a group with regard to the desirability of whose procreation no doubt has ever been expressed by anyone) and it is a sound project in racial improvement. . . ."

In emphasizing the need for the Bill, the article also points out the present anomalous state of the law. Well-to-do persons, whether defective or not, can and do obtain sterilization at will. But the State, munici-

pal, and charitable institutions which would otherwise perform the operation for the poor, dare not take the risk, however remote, of a prosecution for a technical, and highly doubtful, infringement of the law. To quote *Nature* again—" So it is that the well-to-do, through voluntary sterilization, are preventing the repetition of hereditary blunders, whilst the poor, who outnumber them, cannot imitate them, even though they would. For this reason, if for no others, it is highly desirable that this Bill, *a purely permissive Bill, concerned solely with voluntary sterilization,* shall become a law of the land."

The italics in the last passage are ours, since any other sort of Bill would be disastrous. An attempt to make sterilization compulsory would not only be unnecessary, but would arouse justifiable opposition in many quarters; and, since undue legislation is always an evil, a Bill which aimed to do more than clarify the present state of the law, might very well result in sterilizing sterilization.

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In this connection, we would call readers' attention to the concluding passages of both the two articles on amentia in this number —Professor Berry's on page 285, and Dr. Penrose's on page 289—and to the family history of the youth who was recently charged with theft at the Clerkenwell police court. Of the mother there are no details, but the father, though not certified—like some 250,000 others in the country—demonstrated in court that he was undoubtedly feeble-minded. The following is the record of their fourteen children :

1. Married and has two children in special school.
2. Married: one child in special school.
3. Married.
4. Went to special school. Now married and deserted. Her three children are physically unfit.
5. Went to special school.
6. Went to special school. Is now married.

7 and 8. Twins; died in infancy.

9. Went to special school.
10. Died of scarlet fever.
11. The accused youth. Went to special school. Now certified as feeble-minded.
12. Died as infant.
13. Out of work.
14. Reported to be diphtheria carrier and now in a fever hospital.

In the restrained language of the Bench, Mr. Claud Mullins, the magistrate, said that " this family history ought to be known . . . though it was not for him to point the remedy." We need only add that if the father had been sterilized, the country would have been saved the burden of 3 children that died as babies, 1 that died later, and 5 that are certified aments; of 3 physically unfit and 3 ament grandchildren. There are already nineteen grandchildren, and since none of the children are yet beyond reproductive age, this may not be the end of the tale.

Mr. Harvie Watt, the M.P. for Keighley, rendered a public service in writing to a large section of the Press to call further attention to this family, and in asking, " How is it possible to hope that the race will improve when the State allows these defective children to grow up and breed lunacy, degeneration, and disease?"

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In the latest of his characteristically invigorating reports on *The Health of the School Child,** Sir George Newman dwells again on the constant improvement in the school health services, and on their results in cleaner, better tended children who are freer than their predecessors from all the many ills which surround the child. But, his candour constrains him to add, " against these substantial gains must be set the almost unchecked stream of mental defect, impaired vision, diseases of the nose and throat, dental defect and the formidable infective diseases of the nervous system. . . ."

Quite apart from other considerations, the failure of amentia to respond to the

* *Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Board of Education for the year 1931.* London, 1932. Stationery Office. Pp. 156. Price 2s. 6d.

improvement in child welfare is in itself evidence of its genetic basis, while its increase—which is not mentioned by Sir George—is clearly due to that welfare's effect in lessening the action of natural selection. "Impaired vision" seems also to have a basis that is mainly hereditary, though the selection factor is likely to be of little importance. The infective diseases of the nervous system probably lie entirely outside the scope of eugenics, while those of the nose and throat are doubtful—though some part of their prevalence may be a reflection of other, more general weaknesses. But evidence is now accumulating that a great deal of dental defect has, like defect of vision, a genetic basis. Caries, however, can be traced back as far as Rhodesian Man and even into other species, and we must wonder how much of its incidence to-day is a revelation of modern dentistry rather than a result of modern conditions—just as reading must be suspected of revealing, rather than causing, our defects of vision. Sir George incidentally outlines an admirable scheme for elucidating the genetic, environmental, and geographical factors in caries.

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One of the most striking facts to emerge from this *Report* is that the prolonged industrial depression has not hitherto had any effect on the well-being of the children. This, which is confirmed by an independent inquiry of the League of Nations (see page 338 of this REVIEW) can only mean either that the medical standard of "adequate nourishment" has hitherto been too high—as is strongly suggested by the Medical Research Council's report (1926) *Poverty, Nutrition and Growth*; that the nutritional factor in health and growth has been generally exaggerated; or that even in these times of depression the poorest of the population are better off than their pre-War and earlier predecessors. Probably all three factors are involved.

A good deal of the *Report* is devoted to this subject of nutrition; but nowhere is there any indication of the biological standards of nourishment adopted. On the contrary, it is fairly clear that each medical man has his own haphazard standards, and the term "under-nourished" a variety of meanings. It may mean that the child has not had enough food; that, in the opinion of the examiner, the food has been of the wrong quality; or, in most cases, that the child is under-size or under-weight—which entirely begs the crucial question, "Is the child really under-nourished, or merely incapable of benefiting from its food?"

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Sir George, who frequently sets the example to his own profession in the emphasis he lays on the constitutional basis of human health and illness, seems to be here unconscious of it, and he ignores it in other passages dealing generally with the welfare of children. For instance, on page 41, he writes: "The steady increase with the rising age of the child in the number of defects found shows clearly that there is something defective in the arrangements made, or available, for care and treatment." It does not, we beg to suggest, necessarily show anything of the sort. On the contrary, without a very high degree of natural selection, such an increase is only to be expected, since genetic deficiencies are bound to become more apparent as the children develop, while the amount of environmental damage must necessarily grow with the numbers of years at risk.

The foregoing quotation is taken from the conclusions arrived at after studying a random sample of 3,000 pre-school children. Twenty-seven per cent. were found to have "mental or physical defects, or to suffer from some definite impairment of health, and even these figures do not include minor degrees of dental and visual defect." Sir George considers that the sample is approximately representative of the total population at the same ages.

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Several years ago Professor William McDougall started a prolonged experiment on rats with the object of determining the

reality or otherwise of Lamarckism. The quality studied was the inheritance of the effects of training. His first report (in the *British Journal of Psychology,* April 1927) was suggestive of Lamarckian transmission, and his second (in the same periodical, January 1930) very decidedly pointed in that direction. It was fully and critically noticed in this REVIEW (April 1930) by Professor F. A. E. Crew who, while he greatly appreciated the value of the work, suggested that the results were due to a form of communication, or social tradition, among the rats.

Besides making several constructive suggestions, Crew eventually decided to repeat McDougall's work in modified form; and at the recent International Congress of Genetics (New York) he read the first account of his results. They are—as would almost be expected from previous repeat experiments—entirely unexpected. Indeed, as Crew himself implies, they are not only inconsistent, but incoherent. It is difficult to find any helpful clue in the breeding and behaviour of his rats—Wistar derivatives, like McDougall's—which affords a basis for further investigation.

There were four main differences between the methods of McDougall and Crew. 1 (*a*) the latter used mixed litters, as he had suggested in his notice, and (*b*) never trained the mother while she was with her young. This eliminates the 'talking' factor. 2. He recorded his results by individual families, instead of by whole generations. 3. He did not reject the 'runts,' as McDougall did. 4. He examined his own learning capacity, as well as that of the rats.

No. 4 indicated that the experimenter unconsciously 'improves' with experience—that is, his rats benefit from it; the results of No. 3 show that McDougall may here have exercised an unconscious selection; No. 2 demonstrated great genetic variation, that was not Lamarckian, in the learning ability of rats and rat families. The experiment as a whole brings the situation back to where it was before McDougall commenced his work, and indicates that though his technique was better devised than any previous experiment, he had nevertheless failed to allow for many factors which are liable to give a pseudo-Lamarckian effect. Fortunately, both experimenters are continuing their work.

The same subject was raised in *Nature* (October 1st) by Mr. A. F. Dufton, who briefly recounted his study of the ages of fathers of one thousand eminent men, compared with those of a "more normal population. . . . The difference between the two curves is so striking—the proportion with paternal age more than forty-five years is twice, more than sixty years ten times, and more than seventy years fifty times the normal. . . ." Supplementing this with certain illustrative instances, Mr. Dufton therefore suggests "that capability may be in some degree an acquired character, and that the older the father the greater the chance of it being acquired."

His "more normal population" is scarcely comparable, however, with the fathers of his eminent men. It belongs to a different historical period—1921, when the age of marriage may have been lower and the frequency of marriage certainly higher than at most of the times when the eminent men were born; it is Scotch, whereas the eminent men were largely English; and it is a random sample, and therefore mainly working-class, while a disproportionate number of the eminent were drawn from the late-marrying upper classes. It is impossible to compare the families which threw up a Bacon and a Pitt with the modern casual labourers, largely Irish, who marry almost in their 'teens and rear their families in the slums of Glasgow and similar cities.

Now that he has raised the issue, however, we hope that Mr. Dufton will continue his studies in the light of these comments, paying especial attention also to the other criticisms suggested (in *Nature,* October 15th) by Dr. R. A. Fisher.